

\$6.95
Canada \$7.95

Gnosis

A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions

No. 43
Spring 1997

John Welwood
on Conscious Love

Jacob Needleman:
Why We Quarrel

Z'ev ben Shimon
Halevi:
Kabbalah Today

The Divine
Matchmaker

S&M and
Spiritual Taboos

The Golden Dawn's
Sex Magic

Love, Sacred & Profane

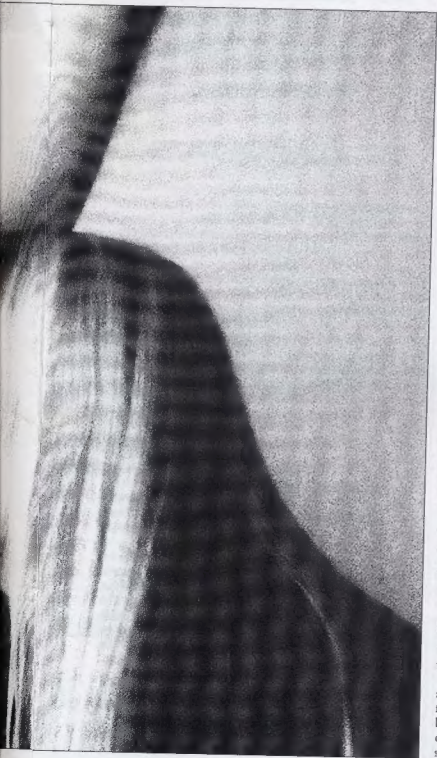


PAIN, DESIRE, AND



PHOTO BY MICHAEL ANGER

AND TRANSCENDENCE



IS THERE A CONFLICT BETWEEN
BDSM AND THE SPIRITUAL PATH?



by Jay Kinney

Submission and surrender are recurring themes in religious literature. We are all familiar with Jesus's injunction to "turn the other cheek" (Luke 6:29), while the word "Islam" literally means "surrender" in Arabic. This submission is conceived of in several ways: a surrender to the Real (*Haq*), that is, an acceptance of actual reality or the way things are; a submission to God's will, usually entailing a change of behavior; or, in more modern psychological terms, the surrender of the ego to the greater Self. In each case, whether one believes in a deity or not, one is surrendering to something beyond one's usual conception of oneself. The lesser is expanded by its submission to the greater.

There are other instances of submission, however, that fall outside those overtly encouraged by our religious and therapeutic priesthoods. Political and social hierarchies — expressed in their most extreme form by fascism — present us with the image of the "little man" surrendering his own power in return for vicariously enjoying the state's or party's exertion of will.

Feminist theory also tells us that recorded history is one long case of feminine surrender to masculine domination; some radical feminists advocate the dismantling of any and all power imbalances, not only between the sexes but in general. Yet as the sales figures of "bodice-ripper" romances testify, the longing to surrender — if not to God, then at least to a handsome rogue — persists in the popular imagination. And if the animal kingdom is any indicator, Nature may provide us with a built-in tendency to order our affairs in patterns of dominance and submission.

Nature would also appear to have provided us with an ample supply of desire in the form of appetites — for food and sex, if nothing else. But desire is less easily embraced by religious authorities than submission. The Buddha identified desire as the root of human suffering. The seven deadly sins of medieval Christianity are primarily

strong passions or emotions. And the Talmud (*Nidda* 13b) goes so far as to state that "he who excites himself by lustful thoughts will not be allowed to enter the division of the Holy One." Given the abundance of such disapproval in the world's religions, it is a wonder that the human species has been able to propagate itself at all, much less view sex as a source of pleasure.

Even in our present era of supposed freedom, desires (sexual and otherwise) have been increasingly cast as accomplices to addiction, the behavioral bogeyman of the late twentieth century. No wonder that the plague of affectlessness and ennui continues to spread. Perhaps the Buddha was remiss in not emphasizing that the lack of desire can also be a source of suffering.

The questions of submission and desire remain rather murky and abstract without the introduction of another leavening agent: love. Whatever the pat formulations about good and bad behavior, love throws a monkey wrench into the works. On the one hand, unconditional love (which is highly valued in New Age and spiritual circles) is characterized by an acceptance of (or surrender to) the object of one's love. This nonjudgmental affection may apply to another individual or to life in general. Yet love cohabits with desire in the sense that to care about someone is to give them priority over others and to desire their well-being and happiness even to the point of undergoing suffering on their behalf. In loving another, in a sense we surrender to them, and thus erotic love represents a nexus of submission, desire, and love. Erotic love is precisely the arousal of desire for the loved one. The mechanism of *eros* fulfilled is the heightening of tension (produced by the friction of desire) to a fever pitch, from which height the

A BOTTOM

WHO WOULD SEEM TO BE
UNDERGOING EXTREME PAIN
MIGHT IN FACT BE "SURFING"
AN ENDORPHIN RUSH OF
INTENSE BLISS.



surrender to union (orgasmic or otherwise) induces relief.

Which brings us, by however roundabout a route, to a consideration of that chronically misunderstood subgenre of erotic love commonly referred to as BDSM (short for Bondage, Discipline, Sadism, Masochism), encompassing both consensual play with power inequalities (usually called Dominance and Submission or D/S for short) and the cultivation of pleasure through the giving or taking of pain or strong sensation (usually called Sadism and Masochism or SM for short).

Despite the prevalence in recent years of bondage and SM chic ranging from punk fashion to films like *Blue Velvet* or *9½ Weeks*, BDSM remains a trigger of an almost universally negative response. And small wonder. To most unschooled observers, the distinction between a consensual SM "scene" and sexual abuse is academic at best and about nil on a gut level. Among civilized folk, an aversion to violence is common, and what is BDSM if not violence?

Things are not quite so simple, however, and I would like to discuss this complex area with the ultimate goal of teasing out its spiritual ramifications. But be forewarned: this investigation is not for the squeamish, so if BDSM automatically raises your hackles, I suggest saving us both undue agitation and moving on to the next article.

To begin with, what exactly does BDSM refer to? Unfortunately, a simple definition is elusive. A multitude of activities and attitudes are covered by this umbrella term, ranging from mild erotic spanking to wrapping a partner in SaranWrap. Finding a common denominator among them can be difficult.

Let's dispose of common misperceptions first. BDSM, as discussed here and as practiced in urban "leather" subcultures, does not entail the exploitation or oppression of unwilling victims by fiendish sociopaths. As detailed in numerous books on the subject, and in discussions held with current practitioners, BDSM proponents of all persuasions insist on mutual consent between participants. This is important to underscore because BDSM pornography or fan-

RECOMMENDED READING

Brame, Gloria G., William D. Brame, and Jon Jacobs.

Different Loving, 1993: 539 pp. (\$25 plus \$3 shipping from Villard Books, Random House, 210 E. 50th St., New York, NY 10022).

Califa, Pat. *Sensuous Magic* 1993: 185 pp. (\$12.95 plus \$1 shipping from Masquerade Books, 801 Second Ave., New York, NY 10017, or phone 800-458-9640).

Easton, Dossie, and Catherine A. Liszt. *The Topping Book Or, Getting Good at Being Bad*, 1995: 150 pp. (\$11.95 plus \$3 shipping from Greenery Press, 3739 Balboa Ave. #195, San Francisco, CA 94121).

Henkin, William, and Sybil Holiday. *Consensual Sado-masochism*, 1996: 264 pp. (\$16.95 plus \$3 shipping from Daedalus Publishing Co., 584 Castro St., Ste. 518, San Francisco, CA 94114).

Warren, John. *The Loving Dominant*, 1994: 339 pp. (\$6.95 plus \$1 shipping from Masquerade Books, 801 Second Ave., New York, NY 10017, or phone 800-458-9640).

ties — contrary to actual practice — often depict scenes of apparent nonconsensuality. (The Marquis de Sade, spinning out his fantasies while locked up in prison, is particularly egregious in this respect.) A mutually agreed-upon BDSM "scene," for instance, may enact all the trappings of one person overwhelming another physically, but within the BDSM subculture, this is done with detailed precautions, "safewords," clearly stated limits, and mutual trust. Given this shared consent and enjoyment, "violence," as commonly understood, is not even an accurate description.

Secondly, most BDSM activities fall under the broad category of Dominance and Submission. One of the better writers on the subject, John Warren, has defined D/S as "a form of erotic play that takes place when one voluntarily gives up some or all of one's power and freedom to another for the purpose of sensual excitement." He goes on to note:

To many who indulge in its pleasures, it is a cathartic sexual game based on fantasy, a sensual psychodrama. Moreover, the term describes both activities and relationships. Those who take part in D&S games at anything more than the most surface level usually discover that these activities intensify the emotional interconnection between themselves and their partners.¹

Thus the giving or receiving of strong sensations — especially pain — may not be involved at all. While BDSM practitioners — particularly those who match the SM part of the acronym — may have eroticized pain, others may choose to have nothing to do with it, preferring to focus on the power dynamics. What is present in most BDSM interactions is a polarity between the person voluntarily giving up control (often called the "bottom") and the person voluntarily taking it on (the "top"). These roles are not gender-bound, and sexual acts may not even be involved. Rather, people within the subculture may feel a primary attraction towards bottoming or topping, with many people (called "switches") choosing to play out both roles.

Another common misconception is that BDSM entails cruelty, anger, or hostility. This was certainly my impression prior to researching this essay. Because most people can only imagine inflicting pain or playing the tyrant as a last resort under the most extreme of circumstances, they associate such exertions of power with an overheated state of mind. Yet BDSM practitioners cultivate precisely the opposite: a kind of mindfulness where the top is careful to respect the bottom's limits and any out-of-control anger is carefully avoided. Like actors onstage, the players in a BDSM scene take on their roles, act them out together in mutual play, and then resurface when the curtain falls. A given scene may depict anger or outrage or fear, but these are entered into, explored, and then left behind at the conclusion of the scene.

Nevertheless the question remains of why someone would willingly place herself at another's mercy and experience episodes of submission or even pain. What's the payoff? Given the power dynamics of our society — which prizes winning and the accumulation of power — the pay-

off for the top is arguably easier to understand. Most would assume — not altogether erroneously — that topping represents a grand opportunity to have your way and lord it over the other person. (That it may, in fact, be a way of serving or assisting another is less obvious but also true; but more on that below.)

The payoff for the willing bottom remains puzzling for most people. The common psychiatric diagnosis is that the bottom is a masochist who was most likely abused when young and is caught in a dysfunctional loop of re-playing abusive episodes over and over in an attempt to make things right. While this may be true in some cases, in others it clearly is not. Debbie Ann, an experienced bottom in the San Francisco BDSM subculture, flatly states that she has had spanking fantasies since the age of three, yet was never spanked when young and did not have an abusive childhood. Other bottoms, who may be high-powered professionals and executives in daily life, indicate that they find it a tremendous relief to give all their power



ART BY JOHN WALLE

over to someone else for a short stretch.

As for pain itself, masochists into BDSM note that the application of force (usually applied in a gradual increase of intensity) triggers endorphin production in the body. As any runner knows, endorphins can produce a kind of "high," even an altered state, which the body reinterprets as pleasure. Thus a bottom who would seem to be undergoing extreme pain, might in fact be "surfing" an endorphin rush of intense bliss. In this respect, appearances can indeed be deceiving.

Obviously the risks involved in negotiating the fine line between pleasure and pain put tremendous responsibilities on the shoulders of the top. A dominant who has a submissive temporarily under his or her power must be knowledgeable of the bottom's tolerance level and limits and must be skilled at interpreting body language, sounds, and other indicators in order to take the bottom to the heights and back down again safely. In light of its risk and requirements, BDSM is likely to remain a minority taste. Yet, for whatever reasons, some people are drawn to it, and it is safe to assume that this will continue to be the case.

For a long time I was puzzled by an acquaintance of

of mine (since deceased) who was both an independent Catholic bishop and a BDSM top. How could he combine these two seemingly contradictory callings? A glimmer of understanding only dawned recently when I came upon this passage in John Warren's book *The Loving Dominant*:

The desire to help, to enhance, or to make happy is common among dominants. This may be why so many of them are in the teaching and helping professions: medicine, social work, religion. Other-centered people make good dominants. Self-centered people often find that the strain of the responsibilities inherent in a D&S relationship is overwhelming.²

In other words, the top often serves as a guide of sorts, attuned to the bottom's physical and psychological responses, taking them on a journey into "sub space" and safely out again. Done right, this calls for heightened empathy and compassion: qualities that the spiritual path develops.

Perhaps the reader begins to perceive the topsy-turvy logic that makes BDSM attractive to some: within its milieu, surrender is transformed into victory; pain is trans-

the BDSM community strikes me as creating less real suffering than the average "respectable" banker, soldier, or politician. In fact, many BDSMers report healing experiences brought about by acting out strongly charged scenarios under controlled conditions that would be quite traumatic in real life. BDSM provides a way for some to meet their Shadow, accept it, and move towards wholeness.

Thus goes the social and psychological rationale for accepting BDSM as a valid, albeit fringe, pursuit. But what are the spiritual implications of BDSM? Are its practitioners all beyond the pale, or are there ways in which, like shamans living on the edge of the village, its practitioners have something important to teach?

In order to pursue this question, let us first consider an emblematic example of pain undergone in the service of spiritual goals: the self-imposed "discipline" of St. Rose of Lima. St. Rose's program of pain is described thus in a late-nineteenth-century Catholic manual:

Extraordinary fests, hair cloths, studded iron chains which she wore about her waist, bitter herbs mingled in the sustenance which she took, and other austerities, were the inventions of her spirit of mortification and penance. She wore upon her head a tin circle of silver (a metal very common in Peru) studded on the inside with little sharp pricks or nails, which wounded her head, in imitation of a crown of thorns.³

In an essay entitled "Passionate Prayer: Masochistic Images in Women's Experience," in *Sex and God: Some Varieties of Women's Religious Experience*, Sara Maitland ultimately locates the source of this spiritualized masochism in external causes: the status of women in Christian theology. As she puts it:

And no penance is ever enough, not even death, not even self-inflicted death, because women are doing penance for the unforgivable sin — the sin of having been born female, having caused the Fall, having made the death of God necessary. . . .

I have called this spiritual disease sado-masochism precisely because the woman so afflicted acts out both roles herself. She has internalized the sadist who is her beloved other, her own projection and her one hope of salvation. He is the lover who loves her pain and she offers it to him humbly and ecstatically.⁴

Compare this description of the Sun Dance among the Sioux tribe, offered by Denise and John Carmody in *Native American Religions: An Introduction*:

The essence of the ceremony was for men to dance for several days gazing at the sun (or the heavens). The dance became an expression of willingness to sacrifice oneself for the well-being of the tribe. The sacrifice was to the heavenly powers, who held the fate of the tribe. In addition to offering their endurance (the constant dancing), partici-

ART BY JOHN WILLE



mutated into pleasure; the dominating top becomes the servant of the bottom; and an episode of seeming tension and conflict can produce a profound feeling of intimacy and connectedness in its midst.

Still and all, doesn't the world already have enough suffering? Must one really condone those who seemingly toy with the creation of more, no matter how consensually? This is a good question, but again the answer is not clear-cut.

Unconscious dominance and submission is rampant in the world. It might well be argued that it is precisely the unconscious playing out of these roles in the service of power hunger, greed, and hatred that is the primary creator of human suffering. This is the nonconsensual pain that is the stuff of daily life, and which is so taken for granted as to be invisible.

By contrast, ethical BDSM practitioners are taking the raw stuff of these deep-seated tendencies toward submission or dominance and working with them consciously. In setting specific limits and cathartically releasing them within a context of mutual cooperation, affection, and pleasure,

IF

BDSM IS

A DISTRACTION FROM

SPIRITUALITY, IT IS NO MORE

SO THAN MOST OF WHAT

OCCUPIES OUR DAY-TO-DAY

ATTENTION.



pants might cut their breasts so as to pass leather thongs through their flesh. They would then tie the thongs to poles set in a circle (representing the hoop of the tribe) and consecrate the blood and pain that resulted to the protection of the tribe.⁵

Like Maitland above, the Carmodys interpret this tour de force of pain and sacrifice as a response to social causes external to the participant: it is done for the sake of the tribe.

However, there are problems with this simple approach. Maitland's feminist ascription of St. Rose's inclinations to women's low position in Christianity fails to explain the similar feats of, say, St. Ignatius of Loyola, who, the same pietistic Catholic manual notes, "wore an iron girdle and a hair shirt; disciplined [i.e., scourged] himself thrice a day, slept little, and lay on the ground."⁶ It is unlikely that St. Ignatius was doing penance for having been born female. Perhaps both Ignatius and Rose were doing penance for having been born at all, but even that seems too reductionist.

Both Maitland and the Carmodys' analyses ultimately assume that their subjects are pawns of larger forces which urge them to feats of pathological self-mutilation. What is missing from such analyses is any insight into the subjective experiences themselves undergone by the suffering individuals.

How did the Sioux come to perceive self-mutilation as having spiritual merit anyway? Or, for that matter, was it only fanatical self-hatred that sustained Rose of Lima in her rigors year after year? The Carmodys do go on to ask "why pain, self-mortification, shows up regularly in the ceremonies of pre-modern peoples the world over."⁷ Their answer, which befits a book published by a Catholic publishing house, does offer a certain moral and spiritual explanation:

It seems clear that pain shows up in many tradi-

tional rituals because human beings realize that doing what is difficult can both strengthen them . . . and intensify their awareness of ultimate reality. Human existence is difficult. To live well requires asceticism: doing what we ought to do, not what our selfishness or laziness prompts. When we sacrifice to live well, as we ought, we realize the demands of ultimate reality. To love God for himself, we can want to put aside God's gifts, material or spiritual. This is a delicate business, especially for people not yet mature. The key would seem to be avoiding sadism, masochism, and the other ways that pain can become twisted into something supposedly good in its own right.⁸

But there is quite a gap between an asceticism borne in order to "live well" and hanging by leather thongs run through your chest. What is this experiential dimension that our critics seem to be missing? Listen to Fakir Musafar, a contemporary adept of body modification and self-mortification who has performed a version of the Sun Dance hanging ceremony on numerous occasions:

It took a long time and a lot of "experiments" before I saw the White Light and finally met my Maker face-to-face. It was out in my garage during a hanging ceremony. And I dumped my "made identity" (ego) and went through all these steps: I was not afraid to be nude in front of people, I was not afraid to feel strong sensation; I was not afraid to get sexually aroused and go beyond it; I was

PENANCE: A CATHOLIC VIEW

Q. What is understood by works of penance?

A. By works of penance is understood any kind of punishment which the sinner willingly undergoes in order to satisfy for his sins, and, as the nature of punishment requires that it be painful and afflicting to self-love; so any thing whatsoever that is naturally painful and afflicting to us, and which we willingly undergo with the view of doing penance for our sins is a penitential work. . . .

A person may be so far advanced in the love of God, and in the virtue of holy mortification, as to have, in a great measure, conquered the natural inclinations of flesh and blood, and even to find pleasure in those things which are naturally painful to us; yet this is so far from lessening the value of the penitential works of that person, that it greatly increases it, and shows the ardor of his love to God, from which they proceed.

From The Manual of the Holy Catholic Church by the Rev. James J. McGovern, D.D. (Chicago: Catholic Art and Publication Office, 1906).

not afraid to go further yet and drift up into nirvana. Finally, I could leave that state and awaken to realize there was a calm, surging White Light just above me, and it said, "Hello! I'm you!" And you can't imagine the love I felt.⁹

In short, certain extreme practices entered into with the right attitude can trigger initiatory and mystical experiences of altered consciousness. The methodology employed may not be to everyone's liking, but it makes its own kind of sense. In light of this, it may come as less of a surprise to discover that most modern handbooks for BDSM include sections on SM and spirituality. This is not to say that every top or bottom is breathing down the neck of the infinite, but a certain number have undergone out-of-body experiences, worked with the effects of different practices on their chakras, and done scenes as conscious acts of spiritual worship or meditation.

Dossie Easton describes one such session:

My bottom and I were in deep grief over a mutual friend and mentor we had lost to AIDS, and we had decided to seek release in ritual S/M. I tied her to a padded table and flogged her to the point of weeping, all the while chanting "Om Krim Kalyae Namaha," an invocation to Kali, the terrifying Hindu goddess of death and birth. As I struck with the whip in rhythm with the chant, I felt myself go into trance, the words of the chant serving to occupy my conscious mind, leaving me free to feel the energy flowing through the whip, my bottom's grief surging beneath me, until I felt in myself Kali the inexorable, the implacable force of nature which dictates that everything we love must die. My partner struggled with her grief, writhing and thrashing, held safe by the bondage, and wept copiously, chanting "Jaia Ma," an invocation to the Mother goddess, over and over, until both of our grief and despair had been fully poured out, and we had reached a sense of exhausted peace with the universe. The Hindus say of Kali that there is no way to understand her, no logic to explain her, no justification — she is like a storm, we have no choice but to love her, and in that love, come to acceptance of our human condition.¹⁰

Still, the fact remains that most BDSM practitioners are primarily focused on mutual pleasure, not deep consciousness alteration or the resolution of grief. Surely erotic pleasure — whether "vanilla" or kinky — doesn't contradict a spiritual orientation. Yet even here opinions are far from unanimous.

The assumption found in most BDSM manuals is that if someone is personally inclined towards BDSM (for whatever reason — and the reasons are myriad), it is healing and supportive of wholeness to accept that fact, rather than spend one's life fighting it. Moreover, as noted before, BDSM practitioners emphasize the cultivation of empathy and sensitivity to one's partner within BDSM play. From their perspective, BDSM should be accepted as a

sensual preference much like any other in the broad range of human behavior and one which is not pathological or anti-social when pursued with self-awareness and care. If a grown man or woman enjoys playing the naughty student called before the school principal for a paddling, what harm is there in that?

As it so happens, the objections are many:

- That enacting any kind of fantasy scenario is being "inauthentic" to one's real life and circumstances;
- That even playacting cruelty or harshness pulls one away from compassion and programs the unconscious with negativity;
- That repeatedly triggering an endorphin high by means of strong sensations or pain can produce an addiction to such stimulation;
- That losing oneself in bodily sensations of both pleasure and pain is a way of forgetting God and of falling into spiritual blindness.

Note that all of these objections, with perhaps the exception of the second one, can apply equally well to non-

ST. ROSE OF LIMA WORE UPON HER HEAD A CIRCLE OF SILVER, STUDDED ON THE INSIDE WITH SHARP NAILS, IN IMITATION OF A CROWN OF THORNS.

BDSM modes of behavior. The Puritans opposed theater in general because of its power to draw both actors and audience into fantasies and dramas that were frivolous and distracting from one's constant moral duty. The same objection can be raised for TV or video games. Like it or not, pop culture in general is not well suited for keeping one grounded in either daily reality or spiritual consciousness. But if BDSM is a distraction, it is no more so than most of what occupies our day-to-day attention. It could well be argued that the essence of the spiritual path is cultivating awareness and remembrance in the midst of any and all situations.

In similar fashion, if endorphin addiction is to be avoided, then athletics and fitness programs constitute a far bigger danger than a few BDSM players flogging each other in rec-room dungeons. Besides, a hearty paddling may be as close as some people will ever come to a good regular aerobics program!

The objection that playacting scenes of punishment or domination coarsens the participants and programs negativity is more formidable. It is a staple of biblical teaching that the *thought* of sinning is as bad as actually sinning. Translated into modern psychological terms, this means that dreams and fantasies can carry as much weight in the psyche as real-life events. Even if a top is skilled at distinguishing between mock violence and "real" violence, and

in keeping actual anger at bay, the fact remains that the top who is acting out a scene of outrage or harshness is taking their nervous system through all the paces that this implies. BDSM handbooks even have a name for the temporary post-scene depression that sometimes results: "top drop." This is not to be taken lightly. However, the same handbooks also spell out effective ways to heal such side effects — again through shared compassion and attentiveness.

By the same token, it might seem logical to assume that a bottom whose masochism is mixed with a bad self-image is only reinforcing the problem by repeating scenes of self-abnegation. Yet for those whose low self-esteem is due precisely to guilt over their attraction to BDSM, learning to feel positive about their inclination can be a path to recovering a sense of self-worth. As such, many bottoms testify that they have never felt so doted upon or so freed from their own limitations as during a BDSM scene. Again it should be noted that not all bottoms' interest in bottoming is rooted in self-hatred or even masochism. There are no easy generalizations.

The emergence of the BDSM subculture on the scene is a relatively new phenomenon of the last two or three decades. The appearance of intelligent and well-thought-out BDSM handbooks, such as those quoted here, are an even more recent by-product of that subculture — most have only been published in the last four years. Thus a wider understanding of the issues addressed here is only in its infancy.

The practical virtue of the BDSM subculture is its function as a safe vessel for those whose inclinations have manifested in practice. Its emphasis on consensuality, safety, shared knowledge, and self-polishing has helped reduce the risks which many isolated practitioners formerly undertook. From a spiritual perspective, however, the BDSM subculture — like most subcultures and ideologies — may err by encouraging its participants to overidentify with their roles to the exclusion of a broader identity. A spiritual danger for the top in wielding so much control over another is the temptation to ego-inflation and the illusion of Godhood. At the same time, a spiritual danger for the bottom in giving over control to the top is the temptation to worship the top as if they were God — in other words, the creation of a false idol or little tin god. These temptations are particularly strong for BDSMers who try to live in a top/bottom relationship 24 hours a day. But they are just that: temptations to be resisted, not *faits accomplis*. Similar temptations — often under circumstances of far less self-awareness — are to be found in many relationships involving positions of authority or subordination.

In any event, this much seems clear: no single answer or analysis fits every case. There are some people for whom BDSM is a enjoyable and reasonable means to manage desires that would fester if repressed. A nonobsessive practice of BDSM in such cases needn't impede spiritual growth and, in some instances, might even assist it through fostering experiences of expanded awareness or self-acceptance. There are others, however, particularly those whose pull towards BDSM is grounded in serious trauma or unresolved abuse or anger, for whom BDSM could

well exacerbate an already unstable condition. Psychotherapy in such cases would likely prove more helpful than BDSM play.

The spiritual path itself is not without risks, for it often entails the eruption of the repressed within the psyche. If the emergence of the previously repressed includes a pull towards BDSM, it would seem best to confront those urges without the stereotypes and prejudices that plague most efforts at understanding. The urge to surrender or to assist another's surrender is not in and of itself bad; nor, I would argue, are the exploration of discipline or pain as sources of pleasure or expanded consciousness. The danger lies, as noted before, in blindly pursuing such goals in the service of the ego's illusions or the body's compulsions.

In closing, I'd like to cite a passage from *In Search of the Miraculous*, where P.D. Ouspensky recounts a conversation with Gurdjieff which may bear on these matters. Gurdjieff, as some readers may know, was a proponent of "conscious suffering" as a means to awaken from the chronic state of "sleep" which engulfs most of humanity. In this passage Ouspensky asks Gurdjieff how the state of being awake can be achieved.

"I have already said before that sacrifice is necessary," said G. "Without sacrifice nothing can be attained. . . . Another thing that people must sacrifice is their suffering. It is very difficult also to sacrifice one's suffering. A man will renounce any pleasures you like but he will not give up his suffering. Man is made in such a way that he is never so much attached to anything as he is to his suffering. And it is necessary to be free from suffering. No one who is not free from suffering, who has not sacrificed his suffering, can work. Later on a great deal must be said about suffering. Nothing can be attained without suffering but at the same time one must begin by sacrificing suffering. Now, decipher what this means."¹¹ ■

NOTES

See references in "Recommended Reading" for books not given full footnote information here.

1. Warren, p. 11.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
3. Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Principal Saints* (New York: Thomas Kelly, 1874), p. 186.
4. Sara Maitland, "Passionate Prayer: Masochistic Images in Women's Experience," in *Sex and God: Some Varieties of Women's Religious Experience*, ed. Linda Hurcombe (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 137.
5. Denise Landner Carmody and John Tully Carmody, *Native American Religions: An Introduction* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1993), p. 69.
6. Butler, p. 260.
7. Carmody and Carmody, p. 70.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
9. *RE/Search: Modern Primitives* (San Francisco: RE/Search Publications, 1989), p. 13.
10. Easton and Liszt, pp. 136-7.
11. P.D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1949), p. 274.